

MR. MCGEE'S ADDRESS

TO THE CATHOLIC PUBLIC—MORE ESPECIALLY TO THE IRISH

A man who for the first time enters public life as one of the legislators of a country,—who is expected by his constituents to represent them on every question; by his co-religionists, at large, to represent them on certain great questions as fully as his own constituents—who has been industriously misrepresented before entering on the stage,—has a difficult part to play. He has to demonstrate his fitness to fill the seat to which he has been chosen; he has to show cause why pre-conceived prejudices against himself and his electors should be abandoned; he has to reconcile his peculiar obligations as the representative of a class, with his general duties as one of the legislators of the country. This was the arduous problem set before me by my kind confiding friends of Montreal in December last, on the demonstration of which I entered in February, and from the continued close pursuit of which, a temporary interruption made in your name, but without your authority, prompts me, at this moment, to address you.

After the adjournment, my friends, I would probably have found some means to place before you a retrospect of the session. To review it now is rather to report progress than to announce results, though some little good has been done, and one great evil at least, averted. But the interruption to which I have alluded has been accompanied by so many mis-statements and misjudgments, that perhaps, it is better I should address you at once, and in this manner, for with the two newspapers, referred to, I can have no discussion.

I felt it to be my duty, in my place in Parliament, to disclaim the writer of one of them, for foisting into the House a most imprudent petition, which was necessarily rejected; and to condemn the open treason of the other, in playing the henchman at Leeds and Grenville to "the father and founder of Orangeism in Canada."

It was, is, and shall be my duty, so long as you desire it, and no longer, to take cognizance of your Parliamentary interests, which, in both the instances I have cited, were endangered and betrayed; but, as regards the newspapers themselves, you must decide whether or not you will permit them to assail me in your name. That is your affair rather than mine. If you approve of their conduct in those cases, and towards me, you will sustain them as before; if, as I have every reason to believe, you totally disapprove of that conduct, you will adopt the only other alternative. In that resort, I have every assurance that you will not be many days deprived of the services of a really independent and unpurchasable Toronto organ.

I assume, that you can all feel how difficult a task I have to perform as your special representative. Usually, men elected by the confidence of their class, when they get into Parliament, finding their *specialité* adhere to them like the shirt of Nessius, take the very first occasion to throw it off. This act is often performed with ostentation and rightly punished as treason. Many a bright promising career has been blasted by candidates undertaking what they had no intention of performing, and no will to attempt after election. I need not mention names; you can recall some such instances. Now I say for myself, I undertook nothing which I do not mean to perform, and therefore I claim to exercise in its full plenitude the power with which I was invested by the Montreal election, and the reception of that event, by the body of my co-religionists in Western Canada. And if I have my part to perform, you will permit me to repeat, that you have yours. Yours is, not to allow me to be caballed against; to be deliberately misrepresented and misreported; to be obstructed and belied in your name, by the paid writers and advertising agents of the present Ministry. This justice I claim at your hands, and, if it were possible, or even probable, that it could be refused to me, I would then have seriously to consider the alternative of withdrawing from public life without further loss of time, and devoting myself, in future to my own private affairs.

I pass now, at once, to the state of parties in the Province; their respective relations towards us, and ours towards them, as I understand them. That the present Prime Minister may be personally, and in his secret heart, a truly liberal man, is one of those suppositions which any one can make, but which no one is bound to believe without evidence. I deal with facts, and will quote a few of quite recent date. The first

fact I shall mention, is Mr. MacDonald's own letter of the date of January 18th, 1858, addressed to Mr. De Grasse, Secretary of Orange Lodge, No. 137, (Gowan, Master,) beginning and ending "Dear Sir and Brother." The second fact is, Mr. MacDonald's response to my direct question on the debate on the address, as to his patronage of

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certain to win converts for all our reasonable demands, among the Upper Canada majority, as well as among the minority.

We have complicated political relations to Upper and Lower Canadian parties. Our proportion—I speak of Irish Catholics only—is to the French Canadians as one to five, and to "the Lower Canadian British" fully two to one; in Canada West there were in 1851, 167,695 Catholics, of whom all but a mere moiety are Irish by origin, though English by speech. On the Provincial population we are, or were at the last census, somewhere about one-fifth of the whole. Our political distribution makes it impossible, as they found formerly, for our British brethren below to act without us, or against us; while our groups of settlers throughout Canada West, and in the cities, often hold the balance between contending candidates.

With our co-religionists of French origin I have all along desired to promote a mutual good understanding. But I will not conceal from you that among a portion of them—I believe a minority—there exists a very determined prejudice against us. Not to mention less known names, Mr. Cartier's insolent declaration in the Montreal Election debate that he "did not want and would not have the Irish," was an exhibition of this spirit not to be forgotten. In old France our kindred in a past age were known and respected as men of high courage and capacity; among the French Canadians of the present day Irish Canadians must *make* themselves respected, before they can enjoy like consideration. With such able and enlightened men as Messrs. Sicotte, Dorion, Thibadeau, Langevin, Laberge, and others, on both sides, no such demonstration may be neces-
sary, but with many it is necessary, and its repetition will be called for until we obtain freely our full mode of consideration from our co-religionists of French descent.

Of the disposition of the English population proper towards us, I have as yet very imperfect information. The pretensions of an Englishman in a Colony are always the highest, but this class is not often organized. For the true English character I have and always had a high respect, as those who remember some of my early Irish speeches, know. In this Province, however, I have come more into contact with Scotchmen than Englishmen, and the Scotch are the controlling element, at this hour, in and Canada West. Some of our friends have a *monomania* on Scotchmen, and have sometimes given imprudent expressions to that feeling. I never could see the wisdom of making enemies of so numerous and respectable a body; and I have, without departing one step from the line of rigid self-respect, endeavoured steadily to diminish that bitter antagonism, and to substitute in its stead a better and friendlier spirit.

For the Protestant Irishman, not an Orangeman, we should feel, and I trust do feel, precisely the same as for one of our own faith. We, Catholics of Irish birth or origin, should never forget how much we owe to liberal Protestants of past and present times in our native land. The glory of Grattan should ennoble in our eyes the whole class to which he belonged. Thus would I, on every side, and without compromise, make friends and disarm enemies; thus would I employ that influence with which you have invested me, to strengthen your position and promote harmony through all Society. At present your influence is less than that of the last and least Orange Lodge in the land; in any rival application to Government, the latest offshoot of the Grand Lodge would be certain to bear off the prize from the 400,000 Irish Catholics of United Canada. This should not continue—need not continue another year—if it be not your own choice, if you *will* not allow yourselves to be degraded and sold through your own "organs." To develope and direct your influence, it is above all things essential that those agents of others should not continue to speak, as if for us, instead of speaking for those who both prompt and pay them. With them, no unity is possible, for they are in the service of other masters. Among all honest men, unity is highly desirable—is every way essential—and that it may be had and held, we must endeavor to procure honest organs, who will have no other gain at heart but the good of the whole body.

I have not spoken of that familiar bug-bear of the press which has assailed me, Mr. George Brown. ~~None~~ *None* of you are very much afraid

of Mr. Brown. I never felt that fear, and I do not now. Mr. Brown has endless energy for business; great earnestness, extensive political information, and indomitable perseverance. These are qualities which, with his youth and constitution, must always make him a power in our politics. But before he can ever form a Cabinet which could be re-elected, he must

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January 18th, 1858, addressed to Mr. De Grasse, Secretary of Orange Lodge, No. 137, (Gowan, Master,) beginning and ending "Dear Sir and Brother." The second fact is, Mr. Macdonald's response to my direct question on the debate on the address, as to his patronage of the order, in this Province. "I acknowledge the fact," were the precise words of the Hon. Premier. Equally clear is the evidence of the Orangeism of the new Post Master General, Mr. Sydney Smith. The resolutions passed by the Cobourg District Lodge, on the 10th of February, 1858, sufficiently proved that: and Mr. Smith "proudly" announced it from the Treasury benches, in the debate on Mr. Benjamin's bill, without rebuke or comment from his colleagues in office. Equally authentic is the somewhat older fact, that Mr. Vankougnet, another member of the present Cabinet, at a dinner given to Mr. Gowan and others, at the St. Lawrence Hall, Toronto, February 16th, 1854, declared his "*wish that all Protestantism might become one vast Orangeism, and all Orangeism one vast Protestantism.*" If, then, this dangerous Institution has, within a few years, grown so bold, that a Governor General officially receives, and a Prime Minister officially patronizes it; if it has grown so bold as to march to the very door of the House playing its most offensive airs and to flaunt, unrebuked, nay, applauded by the Ministerial side, on the floor of Parliament its most offensive emblem—who, but the Government of the day—its avowed patrons and abettors—are responsible?

Let no honest man talk of the "private opinions" of this or the other Minister, in presence of such facts as these. Here is the evidence to prove that three, at least, of the Upper Canadian Ministry, including the Premier, are Orangemen, and sworn patrons of their "Brethren;" and therefore, can, on no pretence whatever, while continuing to be such, merit the support of an honest opponent of the Orange institution—least of all, of any Irish Catholic who knows what is, has been, and continues to be, the spirit of that Institution.

No doubt, there is bigotry on both sides; but bigotry *dissociated* can never be as formidable as bigotry *associated*. It is the *system*, in this case, which gives longevity to the spirit. How many individual prejudices against Roman Catholics, have been conquered in the Anglican world the last sixty years! yet the Belleville organ of Orangeism boasts that the Brethren are to-day "what they were sixty years ago." I can well believe it. I can well believe that Mr. Ogle R. Gowan, is in this respect, the true son of that Hunter Gowan, at whose name every Wexford Catholic shudders with horror. Observe also, that the aggressions upon us, in the present session, have all come from Ministerial supporters. Mr. Benjamin and Mr. Ferguson are two of their most steady supporters, and Mr. Gowan, after a charming display of coy aversion, has naturally relapsed to his old employers. I do not say they have all the bigots on that side; by no means; but I do say, they have the power and have taken the best means, to foster and encourage this monstrous evil in Canada.

Let me next call to your attention that the Opposition benches, where I sit, are filled with all shades of opinion. Consistent Conservatives, like Wallbridge, Burwell, and Hogan; ex-ministers, like Messrs. Couchon, Lemieux and Ross,—who, however, border on the cross-benches; old Reformers like Sandfield MacDonald, Mackenzie, and Foley; liberal French-Canadians, like Mr. Dorion and his friends; and the new Western members who have chiefly come in under the lead of Mr. Brown. To confound all these sections under one sweeping anathema shows great ignorance or great folly: in dealing with them, it seems to me, we should be liberal with the liberal, and firm with the hostile; that we should not suffer ourselves to be outdone in courtesy by any; that we should be just to all, running amuck against none. By this course I do not despair of seeing as sound and just a spirit finally prevail in the opposition ranks, on Catholic questions, as now exists on most national subjects—such as the Hudson's Bay territory, the Seat of Government, and the maintenance of the Union. A representative of your interests, cherishing such a hope must patiently labor for its accomplishment, for, assuredly, it is not to be effected in a day, nor in a single session. But I think I may, with confidence report, that a better spirit than that shown in the general election, has made some progress in the House during the present year—and this, mainly, though not solely, among the Opposition. The tone taken towards our religious orders, and the Orange Incorporation bill, are proofs of my assertion. I am satisfied that a firm and conciliatory conduct is

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has endless energy for business; great earnestness, extensive political information, and indomitable perseverance. These are qualities which, with his youth and constitution, must always make him a power in our politics. But before he can ever form a Cabinet which could be re-elected, he must give convincing proofs of a different spirit, from the spirit of the *Globe* during the late election. That spirit never can rule in Canada, and you need not, my friends, have the least apprehension of a Ministry being formed in such an aggressive spirit. To give Mr. Brown his due, we must remember how ferociously he was assailed by organs speaking in your name. To give him his due, we must treat him, like all other public men in the Province, impartially and according to his actions. This is the rule by which I have been governed, and if, without compromise, I could see Mr. Brown back on the old Baldwin platform, I confess, for your sakes, I would be glad of it.

It seems to me, it is much better have such a man for a friend, if it can be done, without violation of principle, than for a foe, by a foolish indulgence in wild denunciations of "the Clear Grits." If however, that cannot be—if Mr Brown should unfortunately prefer to rally and rely on the antipathies of religion and race, rather than on reason, justice, and common sense, it places me and places you in a still better position than we held before, if we show our willingness to welcome any act of liberality, from Mr. Brown, just as if it come from any other man or party; no more and no less.

To conclude: our Politics at present resemble a good deal, what Surgeons call, "a compound fracture." The bones of a great state were set in 1841, but are not yet well knit. Some soreness and swelling remains, and the most patriotic vigilance must be exercised, to prevent mortification setting in. I do not believe a dissolution of the Union to be the real remedy. And I do not believe that, under our system, and on the American Continent, numbers can be steadily ignored, as the prime basis of representation. A revision of our whole constitutional system cannot be far off, and while I would resist, and have already voted against an unequal representation under the present Union act, I am quite ready to admit, that in any new arrangement, the representation in the popular branch at all events, must be proportioned to population. Abundant constitutional safeguards for the rights of Lower Canada—securing if need be under a Federal pack the autonomy of Lower Canada can be found; and my humble adhesion to any such arrangement, would mainly depend on the fact of its being sanctioned by the majority of the people of Lower Canada. This change, I believe must come, and I do not anticipate from it, those frightful consequences which fill the imagination of certain political prophets. I would rather expect, that by rendering the French and Irish more necessary to each other, and the British more just to both, it would, on the contrary, tend to hasten the advent of a genuine Canadian Nationality, co-extensive with the country, and enduring as its hills.

Towards the construction of such a Nationality, I would fain hope—if I am to act for you, which is for yourselves to say—I may do something. But that I may do it, I must not be prejudged, counteracted, and calumniated, by persons unwarrantably using your name, but really in the pay of one wing of the party at present in power.

I remain my friends,

Your faithful and obedient Servant,

THOMAS D'ARCY MCGEE.

TORONTO, June 12, 1858.

* * * I may here state, that the *Toronto Mirror* of the 7th of May, voluntarily offered the use of its columns "to disseminate ~~s~~ opinions, and give them to the country without change or mutilation," but suppressed without a word of explanation, public or private, a short note which I sent them the following week. Also, that having requested insertion for this address in the *Catholic Citizen*, after its whole pages of attack, I was answered by its editor, under date of June 12th, that his "rule in reference to communications is to publish them or not, according to his views of their fitness." Under these circumstances I have not troubled either of those newspapers, and they, of course, will not give this document "to the country without change or mutilation." I expect greater fairness from the Canadian press generally, to whom copies of this broad sheet have been sent.

